

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: A TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Religious tolerance is a vital tool for National Development. It is an essential element of a peaceful nation, where people of different religions, beliefs, and cultures can coexist peacefully without any discrimination. The concept of religious tolerance has been widely discussed and debated throughout history. The importance of accepting and respecting diverse religious beliefs and practices has become increasingly recognized in recent times. However, this paper adopts explorative method to explore the significant role of religious tolerance in promoting National development. It discusses the importance of religious tolerance, its benefits to the nation, as well as the negative consequences of religious intolerance. This study highlights the various strategies that can be used to promote religious tolerance in the society. The study shows that intolerance affects social, economic and political stability, thereby impeding development. It argues that religious tolerance can promote national integration, unity, and growth as it fosters mutual respect and understanding across diverse religious traditions. Finally, the study outlines measures including education, dialogue, and legal frameworks that can foster tolerance, cooperation and inter-religious harmony in Nigeria with the ethnography gathered from the street of Ojo Local Government area forms the basis of this study.

Keywords: *Religious Tolerance, Dialogue, National Development, Intolerance.*

Introduction

Religious tolerance is the capacity of people to respect the faith and belief of another without any signs of prejudice and discrimination. It is the ability of people of different religions, beliefs, and

cultures to coexist peacefully. It constitutes a significant determinant of a peaceful coexistence and economic growth of a country. Religious tolerance is essential for a peaceful society, where people are allowed to worship their religion without any discrimination. Religious tolerance is a vital tool for national development, as it promotes unity, harmony, and peaceful coexistence. In a country where there is religious tolerance, people from different religions can work together towards the development of the nation (Adeleke, 2018). The absence of religious tolerance leads to conflicts, violence, and chaos, which retards national development. Religious intolerance has created complications that have inhibiting effects on national development in many countries, such as Nigeria, India, and Pakistan (Chaturvedi, 2018). Religious unrest can cause a drop in foreign investment, resulting in reduced economic growth. This paper aims to discuss how religious tolerance can foster national development, with a focus on Nigeria.

Religious diversity has always been a cornerstone of human civilization, and it continues to be a fundamental part of our society today. With the increasing diversity of religious beliefs, it has become imperative to embrace religious tolerance as a tool for national development. Religious intolerance is often a source of conflict in many parts of the world, and it has negative effects on various aspects of a country such as social, economic and political stability, which forms the basis of our discussion in this study (Omosho & Ajayi, 2020). Religious intolerance undermines national development in several ways:

First, it creates factionalism and division among the people, which can lead to unstable social systems. In countries where there are religious differences between the majority and minority groups, tension, conflicts and even violence can occur, and this can result in low economic productivity and little investment, thus hindering development.

Secondly, religious intolerance discourages progress towards democracy and good governance. When there is religious intolerance, politicians can use religious identities as avenues to gain much-needed support or to divide and rule their constituents. This can lead to governments that are weak, ineffective and unresponsive, making it difficult to implement sustainable development programs.

Therefore, promoting religious tolerance is necessary, as it has numerous benefits for national development. It ensures peaceful coexistence among people and different religious groups. Religious tolerance also challenges the beliefs and thought processes of individuals, provoking critical thinking, mutual respect and understanding; thus, fostering an inclusive and progressive in the society. Furthermore, religious tolerance promotes economic development by reducing social and political tensions; ensuring religious minorities have equal opportunity to contribute to the economy. It also encourages local and international investment.

Methodology

This paper adopts explorative method to explore the significant role of religious tolerance in promoting National development. It discusses the importance of religious tolerance, its benefits to the nation, as well as the negative consequences of religious intolerance.

Religion

Religion is a universal institution in human society. It is found in all societies, past and present. All the preliterate societies known to us have religion. Religion goes back to the beginning of the culture itself. It is a very ancient institution. There is no primitive society without religion. Like other social institutions, religion also arose from the intellectual power of man in response to certain felt needs of men, while most people consider religion as universal and therefore, a significant institution of societies. It is the foundation on which the normative structure of society stands. Scholars have found it difficult to develop a consistent definition, with some giving up on the possibility of a definition (Puja, 2012).

It is the social institution that deals with sacred things that lie beyond our knowledge and control. It has influenced other institutions. It has been exerting tremendous influence upon political and economic aspects of life. It is said that man from the earliest times has been incurably religious. Judaism, Christianity, Islam (Semitic religions), Hinduism and Buddhism; Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto (Chinese-Japanese religions) etc. are examples of the great religions of the world. Every set of religion must have a dialogue and tolerate one another; this is the essence of this study.

Tolerance and Intolerance

Tolerance is considered a critical and adequate response to the challenge of how conflicting ways of life can freely express themselves and peacefully coexist with each other. A society that is culturally, religiously, and ideologically plural implies diversity of substantive worldviews and lifestyles (Maykel & Rachel, 2021). This diversity gives rise to moral controversies over contrasting and conflicting perspectives about how people, or even society, ought to behave. The need to manage these controversies makes tolerance both relevant and urgent: “Tolerance makes difference possible; difference makes tolerance necessary,” (Kaur, 2017). Tolerance of dissenting beliefs and ways of living is seen as a necessary condition for societal functioning, whereas intolerance breeds separation, and tensions and hostilities between individuals and groups. Political leaders, the European Union, the United Nations (UN), and nongovernmental organizations have all warned against intolerance; emphasized the importance of tolerance for peaceful societies; and proposed policies that promote tolerance. For example, in 1996, the UN General Assembly invited member states to observe November 16th as the International Day for Tolerance, following from the UN Year for Tolerance in 1995. In Europe, there is the “European medal of tolerance,” the “European day of tolerance,” and a “European model law for the promotion of tolerance and the suppression of intolerance.” Furthermore, a European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has been installed. Similarly, religious and civic associations as well as schools worldwide promulgate tolerance and teach tolerance as a mode of addressing cultural and other forms of diversity.

A tolerant person is someone who is appreciative, open-minded, and “on friendly terms with all sorts of people,” (Gallois, 2019). In contrast to the classical understanding, dislike or disapproval of dissenting beliefs and practices is not considered a necessary aspect of tolerance but rather the opposite of it. According to this understanding, it would be odd to say that a person who is favorably disposed toward minorities is not tolerant of them or a person who accepts more and values diversity more is less tolerant. Claiming that a person is tolerant would not mean that they endure many things that they disapprove of, but rather that they disapprove of little. Tolerance in

this understanding implies a positive response to diversity itself, and intolerance is equated with dogmatism, closed mindedness, and prejudice more generally.

Thus, the concept of tolerance is widely embraced across many settings for many sorts of differences (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality), and across a diverse ideological and left-right political field (Mannion, 2007). However, our ability to create, evaluate and implement appropriate policies is limited by tolerance and intolerance having various meanings that can be used in different ways and for different purposes. For example, sometimes the concept of tolerance refers to endurance and putting up with things one dislikes and disapproves of, and sometimes to open-mindedness and the general willingness to accept a broad range of differences, and even for embracing and celebrating the practices and behaviors of dissenting others (Allewi & Savina, 2017). These different understandings raise different empirical and practical questions. They might have different implications for the efforts to manage diversity in pursuit of a more civil society made up of our cultural, religious, and ideological differences. Therefore, since we are of diverse culture, ideology and Religions, we must be tolerant of one another to foster peace and unity.

Religious Tolerance

Religious tolerance is the ability to accept and coexist peacefully with individuals or groups of different religions, beliefs or faiths. It is a crucial aspect in the harmonious coexistence of people in a society, and an essential tool for the development of a nation. Religious tolerance cultivates a peaceful environment that facilitates economic and cultural growth, education, unity and national cohesion (Ajadi & Fagbemi, 2019).

Religious diversity is a reality in many nations, and it is imperative for people to learn to tolerate each other's religious beliefs and practices. This ability fosters tolerance towards differences, which is essential in building respect and understanding across cultural and religious divides. It is through the ability to accept differences that society finds common ground and a sense of unity, which helps communities to come together and work towards a common goal.

In nations where there is religious tolerance, citizens have a chance to live without the fear of persecution or discrimination based on their religious beliefs. This environment of tolerance creates a sense of security, which encourages people to settle down and drive innovation, economic growth and social development. Countries that have a reputation for religious tolerance are more likely to attract and retain international investments, increasing their potential for growth (Ibrahim, 2015).

Religious tolerance also helps promote education and academic excellence. Students are empowered to pursue all areas of knowledge without the fear of persecution, restriction or forced indoctrination. Higher learning institutions that embrace religious diversity often produce scholars who are capable of applying reason, logic and critical thinking to solve societal problems. Such individuals are well-equipped to contribute positively to society, fueling economic and technological development.

Additionally, religious tolerance fosters unity in a country. A unified society is more stable, enabling peaceful coexistence among citizens, and reducing the probability of conflicts arising. For example, in India, which is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, religious tolerance has enabled citizens to enjoy unity in diversity. It has cultivated an environment for peaceful coexistence among India's myriad religious communities, promoting the country as a global economic power. However, a unified society only exists if they inculcate the spirit of tolerance (Ibrahim, 2015).

Religious Tolerance and Economic Development

Tolerance is a significant aspect of economic development. The degree of intolerance experienced in a country corresponds to a reduction in economic development. A lack of religious tolerance results in violence and conflict, which adversely affect the economy. Foreign investors tend to avoid investing in countries with high levels of intolerance), which results in lower economic development. Religious tolerance provides an enabling environment for economic growth by ensuring security, peace, and full utilization of resources. When people feel safe and secure, they make investment decisions that promote economic growth.

Religious Tolerance and National Unity

Unity is an essential factor for national development. Without unity, a nation is divided, and it will be challenging to achieve common goals that translate into national development. Religious intolerance undermines unity by creating distancing relationships among citizens of different faiths. It promotes mistrust and ethnic clashes, which can lead to civil unrest and a drop in economic growth.

Religious Tolerance and Democracy

Democracy is an essential ingredient for national development, and religious tolerance is critical for a democratic structure. Religious tolerance promotes political stability and ensures that everyone is equal before the law, regardless of their faith. An intolerant society breeds insecurity and violence that threatens democracy (Ibrahim, 2015).

Importance of Religious Tolerance

1. Promotes Unity and Harmony

Religious tolerance promotes unity and harmony among people of different religions. It creates an environment where people can practice their religion without fear of discrimination or persecution. This environment fosters unity and cooperation among people, which leads to national development. It promotes unity and peace among different ethnic and religious groups. It encourages respect for diversity and helps to create a harmonious and cohesive society.

2. Boosts Economic Development

Religious tolerance is a vital factor in economic development. It creates an environment of stability, which attracts investments and boosts economic growth. Investors are more likely to invest in a country where there are religious tolerance and peace. Religious tolerance promotes socio-economic development. It creates an environment that allows people of different religious backgrounds to coexist peacefully and collaborate in various economic activities. Religious

tolerance opens up opportunities for trade, investment, and tourism, which can contribute to economic growth and development (Mukhtar, 2018).

3. Enhances Education and Research

Religious tolerance promotes education and research. It encourages people from different religions to share their knowledge, skills, and experiences which lead to the development of new ideas and innovations. It also enables one to learn from one another. Religious tolerance is essential for conflict resolution. Religious conflicts are often fueled by religious intolerance and lack of understanding of other people's beliefs. By promoting religious tolerance, conflicts can be resolved peacefully without resorting to violence (Mukhtar, 2018).

Negative Consequences of Religious Intolerance

1. Violence and Conflicts

Religious intolerance leads to violence and conflicts. It creates a situation where people from different religions are constantly at odds, leading to chaos and unrest in the society.

2. Retards Economic Growth

Religious intolerance leads to a lack of investment and economic growth. Investors are hesitant to invest in a country that is prone to violence and conflict.

3. Hinders Education and Research

Religious intolerance hinders education and research. It creates an environment where people are hesitant to share their knowledge and skills, leading to a lack of innovation and progress (Maykel & Rachel, 2021).

Strategies to Promote Religious Tolerance

Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is an effective strategy for promoting religious tolerance. It encourages people from different religions to exchange ideas and engage in meaningful discussions. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation can promote religious tolerance. Interfaith meetings and forums provide opportunities for people of different religions to interact and learn from each other. Such interactions are essential in breaking down religious stereotypes and fostering mutual understanding and respect.

Education and Awareness

Education and awareness programs are essential for promoting religious tolerance. These programs educate people about the importance of religious tolerance and its benefits to the society. Education is one of the most effective ways of promoting tolerance. Educating people about different religions and their beliefs, practices, and customs can enhance understanding and respect for diversity. Schools and universities can play a critical role in teaching religious tolerance through their curriculum.

Government Policies

The government can promote religious tolerance through the implementation of policies that protect the rights of people of all religions. The government can also promote interfaith initiatives to foster unity and cooperation among people of different religions. Promoting tolerance through legislation and policies is critical. Governments should enact laws and policies that promote religious freedom and protect the rights of minority groups. Such policies can include creating a favorable environment for religious groups to practice their faith and ensuring that religious minorities are not discriminated against (Okoye, 2014).

Religious Tolerance in Nigeria

Nigeria is a diverse country with over 200 ethnic groups and various religions. Notably, there are three dominant religions; Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religion, with each accounting for about 50% of the population. Nigeria also has several traditional religions that are practiced by a minority of the population. While religious diversity is a significant strength for

national unity, it has also led to several conflicts and tensions in the country. Nigeria has experienced incessant religious crises between its numerous religious groups, which has resulted in significant loss of lives and destruction of properties. Religious intolerance has been a significant challenge, resulting in violence, discrimination, and social unrest. These conflicts have adversely affected Nigeria's development and hindered its progress towards national unity. Therefore, promoting religious tolerance is vital for sustainable national development in Nigeria (Olugbade, 2018).

Religious tolerance is essential for national development because it ensures peaceful coexistence, social stability, and economic growth. Religious intolerance often leads to religious crises, which disrupt the social and economic growth of a nation, leading to political instability. The coexistence of Nigeria's different religions promotes social stability and peaceful coexistence, an essential factor in national development. Moreover, through religious tolerance, the religious differences between Nigeria's different groups become a source of knowledge and cultural development that help in shaping a unique Nigerian identity, promoting national unity (Ojo & Adeleke, 2019).

Religious Tolerance as a Tool for National Development

Religious tolerance is an essential tool for national development as it fosters peace, unity, and social cohesion. Promoting religious tolerance enhances the social fabric of a society, leading to economic growth and development. Religious tolerance ensures that individuals can respect and coexist with the religious beliefs, practices, and values of others. It also facilitates the accommodation of all groups in a society, regardless of their religious or cultural differences. This accommodation ensures that all citizens enjoy equal rights, opportunities and privileges (Adewale & Adeyemo, 2020).

In Nigeria, promoting religious tolerance is essential for enhancing national development. Religious conflicts have contributed negatively to the country's socio-economic development, causing social unrest, displacement, and economic losses. Nigeria struggles with terrorism, ethnic and religious tensions, rural-urban migration, poor education, and healthcare. Hence, the need for

religious tolerance to enhance national development cannot be overemphasized (Omotosho & Ajayi, 2020). Religious tolerance can help to:

Promote Interfaith Dialogue: Interfaith dialogue is important for fostering understanding and respect between different religious groups. Encouraging dialogue between Muslims and Christians can help to reduce religious tensions, promote mutual respect and understanding. Since Religious tolerance supports Access to education, providing the ability for people to acquire knowledge in a safe and peaceful environment. Nigeria's environment of religious tolerance will enable people and scholars from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to obtain education through state institutions. This will promote equal access to knowledge, encourages exposure to varied cultural perspectives, and helps develop a more tolerant society.

Develop a Sense of National Unity: One of the primary aims of religious tolerance is the fostering of national unity and cohesion. Nigeria is a nation with over 200 ethno-linguistic groups; thus, the collective interests of all groups must be harnessed through tolerance. Through tolerance, Nigerians can focus on nation-building and compete and work together as independent agents. Promoting religious tolerance can help to enhance the sense of national unity and identity. When different religious groups tolerate and acknowledge one another's practices, culture, and beliefs, it creates a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Foster Social Cohesion: Religious tolerance promotes social cohesion, cooperation, and trust among various religious groups. When people learn to accommodate each other, it helps to reduce conflicts, and promote peaceful coexistence. The peaceful coexistence of Nigeria's different religions has promoted national and international trade, tourism and attracted foreign investors. Similarly, religious tolerance supports an increase in economic development through foreign expertise and encourages access to global markets.

Promote Economic Growth: Religious tolerance will also contribute to economic growth by creating an environment that is conducive for businesses to thrive. Investors are more likely to invest in a country that has a reputation for tolerance and social harmony, as it provides a stable and peaceful environment for businesses to operate.

Promote International Recognition: Religious tolerance will show a country as an exceptional destination for business and investment, which the international community acknowledges. The

country global reputation as a religiously tolerant nation creates an environment where investors, tourists, and international stakeholders feel comfortable conducting business, hence, increasing Nigeria's international recognition and status.

Promote Democracy: Religious tolerance also helped to promote democracy in a country. It has enabled citizens from different religious backgrounds to participate actively in politics, irrespective of their faith. This has resulted in more inclusive government policies, which have improved the lives of citizens (Adewale & Adeyemo, 2020).

Challenge Religious Extremism: Promoting religious tolerance can help to challenge extremist ideologies, beliefs, and practices. It is crucial to teach religious communities how to deal with extremism within their faiths.

Strategies to Enhance Religious Tolerance in Nigeria

Several strategies can be adopted to enhance religious tolerance in Nigeria. These strategies include:

Incorporating Religious Studies in the Educational Curriculum: Religious studies can promote religious tolerance by teaching the fundamental principles, beliefs, and practices of different religions. This will help to plant the seeds of tolerance and respect for other religions in the minds of students at an early age.

Government Intervention: The government can enact policies and laws that promote religious tolerance. Government agencies can create programs that encourage interfaith dialogue and collaboration.

Interfaith Dialogue: Encouraging interfaith dialogue can help to promote mutual respect and understanding among different religious groups. This can take the form of joint religious festivals, seminars, and training programs.

Promotion of Religious Diversity in Public Offices and Leadership Roles: Political offices and key leadership roles should be open to candidates from different religious backgrounds. This promotes diversity and ensures that all religious groups are represented in the governance structure.

Promotion of Religious Tolerance in the Media: The media has a powerful influence on public opinion, and promoting religious tolerance through the media can foster change in the society (Osifeso & Oladejo, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Religious intolerance has created complications that have inhibiting effects on National development in many countries, such as Nigeria, India, and Pakistan. Religious unrest can cause a drop in foreign investment, resulting in reduced economic growth. Religious intolerance leads to violence, conflicts, and chaos, which hinders national development.

The promotion of religious tolerance through interfaith dialogue, education and awareness, and government policies is essential for the development of a peaceful and prosperous society. By promoting this, countries can increase their chances of enjoying sustainable development, democracy, social justice, and overall prosperity. However, Religious tolerance is not a journey to be undertaken by nations alone. Individuals must be accountable in keeping an open-mind, respecting different religious ideologies, and collaborating with diverse groups to achieve national and societal goals.

Therefore, to promote religious tolerance for national development; governments, communities, and individuals can take several steps:

Regular Interfaith Dialogue: Encourage regular interfaith dialogues and discussions where people from different religious backgrounds can engage in open and respectful conversations.

Media Responsibility: Promote balanced and unbiased coverage to prevent the spread of misinformation and to foster understanding among different religious communities.

Rethinking and Re-Inclusive of Governance: Ensure that government institutions and public services are inclusive and representative of diverse religious groups.

Community Initiatives: Support grassroots initiatives that promote interfaith cooperation, social integration, and community development.

Re-International Cooperation: Participate in intergovernmental forums and initiatives aimed at advancing religious freedom and tolerance globally.

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